Food-borne illnesses cost India $28 billion a year: report

At a two-day conclave on food safety and nutrition, Health Minister says focus should be on preventive and promotive healthcare

Food-borne illnesses are imposing an economic burden of as much as 0.5% of India’s GDP, or about $28 billion a year, stated a report shared by researchers from Denmark at the two-day ‘National Conclave on Food Safety and Nutrition’ held in the city.

Organised by the Ministry of Health and the Family, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the event saw a round table of State health Minister from Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Telangana, Puducherry, Jharkhand and Delhi, presided over by Union Health Minister J. P. Nadda.
Centre support

Mr. Nadda said that the Centre is providing support to the tune of ₹482 crore to the States and as many as 45 labs are to be strengthened for greater food safety.

“We must safeguard public health by ensuring all food businesses are licensed and follow standards. At the same time, we should be careful that it does not put unnecessary regulatory burden on businesses,” noted the Minister. “The focus should shift from disease-centric treatment to preventive and promotive healthcare,” Mr. Nadda added.

The Minister also released the FSSAI’s ‘Healthy India Food Calendar’. The first-of-its-kind calendar covers India’s main festivals, the food associated with them and their nutritional benefits. The FSSAI’s revamped website was also launched on Tuesday.

Campaigns planned

Meanwhile, the State health Ministers decided to launch a campaign, with special focus on youth and school children, for limiting energy intake from fatty food.

The campaign aims to get people to reduce their daily caloric intake from fatty foods to less than 30% and eliminate trans-fats completely (i.e., bring down consumption of trans-fat to less than 1% of total caloric intake, reducing salt consumption to less than 5 gm per day and limiting intake of free added sugar to less than 10% of daily caloric intake) by 2022.

The Ministers also decided to promote organic food and dietary diversification to integrate local and regional cuisines.

It was further decided that efforts would be made to encourage people to eat more fruits and vegetables — at least 450-500 gm/day — and moderate the intake of refined carbohydrates.